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ABSTRACT

School districts faced with declining enrollments can utilize several strategies for dealing with reductions in force while saving money, minimizing terminations, and creating new opportunities. Schools should be staffed on the basis of midyear projections to avoid too great a degree of overstaffing by year's end. An early retirement plan should be adopted. A strong policy of termination for cause will help eliminate unsatisfactory teachers instead of those merely low in seniority. Declining districts can cooperate with neighboring growing districts to place surplus staff members. Surplus teachers who are not placed elsewhere can serve as a well-trained corps of substitutes. Aggressive attempts to obtain project funding may provide new jobs for displaced staff. Secondary teachers can be trained to take elementary teaching positions. Communications between potential surplus personnel and district officials must be kept open and district commitments to personnel must be made clear. (Author/PGD)

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# Declining Enrollment A People Problem (Effective Strategies for Reducing Staffs)

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AASA
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## Introduction.

Projections out of the U. S. Office of Education indicate that from 1973 to 1983 enrollment in public school will drop from 45.4 million to 41.0 million. During the same ten-year period, however, the total number of available teachers will increase considerably. The result is that many new teachers will not be able to find employment and many presently employed teachers will become unemployed. To a lesser extent, declining pupil enrollments will affect administrators and classified school employees.

Reduction in school staffs should not be interpreted to mean that schooling is "a declining industry", nor does it mean that schools are losing their importance in our nation. Declining enrollments is a phenomena to which schools can adjust and from which we can derive some benefits. Although it is a difficult and sensitive problem; it is, nevertheless, one that is subject to solution.

## Staff for Mid-Year Projections.

Declining enrollments can create serious financial problems unless school administrators staff carefully. Most school districts employ teaching personnel on a teacher/student ratio; e.g., 30/1 or 28/1 or 25/1. Instead of staffing on the beginning of the year student enrollments, it is wise to staff on mid-year enrollment projections. Otherwise, the school district will be overstaffed and quickly waste substantial amounts of money.

In a declining enrollment district, there is a continuous loss of students throughout the school year. The mid-year staffing ratio is the mean-ratio for the school year. Thus, the district would have a larger ratio during the first semester and a smaller ratio during the second semester. If the staffing ratio is to be 30/1, the staffing requirements would be based on the number of students projected to be

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enrolled in the district at mid-year. This would then possibly create a 32/1 ratio at the beginning of the year and a 28/1 ratio at the end of the year. The yearly average would be 31/1.

The practice of staffing on mid-year projections can save money and also provide equitable staffing resources for schools that lose students (high schools) and schools that do not lose students (elementary schools). The alternative, staffing at beginning of the year enrollments, produces considerable staffing "fat" by the end of the year. Staffing on mid-year enrollments saves money, but it intensifies the staff reduction problem. Since fewer teachers are needed, more will need to be terminated--or, if not terminated, to be utilized in other ways. Regardless, the problem is intensified.

The fortunate part of this whole problem is that we now have effective ways of dealing with reduction in work force. Experience has shown that alternatives are available to us which will (1) save money, (2) reduce staff, (3) minimize terminations, and (4) create new opportunities.

Strategies for Staff Reduction.

1. Adopt an early retirement plan. One approach to minimize involuntary terminations, needed to achieve appropriate staffing levels, is the adoption of an early retirement plan. Having older teachers retire early reduces the possibility of terminating young teachers. Early retirement programs make it possible for older teachers to leave teaching in a dignified manner, provide retirees with additional financial security, hold jobs for younger teachers, and sometimes save money for the school district.

   In an early retirement program, the district pays a stipend to those who retire early, and thereby, saves jobs for younger teachers. The difference between the salary of an older teacher and that of a younger one is a savings to the district which can be paid as a stipend

to the retiree. It is important that in computing the stipend districts take into account the ages of potential retirees, the salary levels of those who would be terminated, and total cost of retirement benefits over an extended period of time.

Excellent early retirement plans have already been established in Palo Alto and Pasadena, California, and in Salt Lake City, Utah. In the last three years 80 staff members have selected to take early retirement in Salt Lake City.

Early retirement incentive plans provide an effective and humane means of achieving some staff reduction without burdening school districts with increased financial obligations.

2. Terminate for cause. A declining enrollment district cannot be burdened with unsatisfactory teachers. It must, therefore, adopt aggressive procedures for termination of teachers who cannot provide satisfactory services. Usually, teacher associations will support termination for cause over termination because of declining pupil enrollments.

An effective termination for cause procedure has been developed by Salt Lake City in cooperation with the Salt Lake City Teacher Association. The process protects teacher "due process"; but, nevertheless, makes it possible to terminate teachers who do not successfully remediate weaknesses. In the past three years 31 teachers have been placedon remediation. Fourteen have been remediated and seventeen are no longer with the District. Remediation/termination procedures also apply to administrators and classified employees.

It is important that everyone understand that a declining enrollment school district cannot "carry" unsatisfactory employees. Each position held by an unsatisfactory person requires the termination of a satisfactory employee. Neither the school district nor the teacher association supports the employment of unable people when able persons are readily available.

3. Work with neighboring school districts. In a particular geographic area some districts are growing while others are declining. It is possible for a consortium of districts to work together to staff their schools. Those who need teachers agree to interview teachers who are to be terminated by the declining districts. In most cases the surplus teachers are desirable younger teachers who are highly qualified. Growing districts which have employed such teachers have usually been pleased with their services, e.g., Granite and Jordan in Utah.

   School districts have formed cooperatives for many types of services: special education, purchasing, and data processing services. The same can successfully be done with staffing needs. Cooperation in this area is beneficial to both growing and declining districts. One saves the headaches of termination and the other saves the cost of recruiting. Together, the districts demonstrate a caring attitude for teachers--an attitude which increases the possibility of cooperation between school districts and associations.

4. Develop a trained corps of substitutes. Should a district not be able to find new positions for all of its surplus teachers, it is possible to utilize them as a trained corps of substitutes. The cost to the district is the difference between the contract salary and the cost of a substitute. The advantage is that the district will usually obtain better service on a reliable basis. In addition, some "substitutes" can be placed in regular positions on jobs which open-up during the year.

   Substitutes can also be utilized for short term tasks. They can work on curriculum, assist as counselors, help with short term problems, and conduct in-service education classes and workshops. Experience indicated that in most school districts there will be some vacancies during the school year. The larger the school district, the more

substitues are qualified to take. It is suggested that districts not have more than one substitute for each 100 certificated staff members.

5. Have everyone become a project writer. Declining enrollments do not necessarily mean that districts must eliminate jobs. It is possible to create new positions. Districts that are losing students must become aggressive in obtaining money from government sources and from private foundations to create new services and to utilize surplus teachers.

   In declining enrollment districts everyone becomes a project writer: the administration, the P.T.A., the Assoication, and parent special interest groups, e.g., Association for Learning Disabilities, and the Association for Citizenship Education.

   Working together, sufficient new funding can be obtained to save many positions. Aggressive work in project writing can save jobs, develop new services, and infuse the district with a new vitality. Especially beneficial is the involvement of parent groups to obtain funds from private special interest sources. The net result is that everyone gains--teachers, parents, and children.

6. Train secondary teachers for elementary positions. There are always more vacancies on the elementary level than there are on the secondary level. It is possible to re-train secondary teachers for elementary vacancies. Districts can establish cooperative programs with nearby universities to provide such training. Care must be taken, however, to select carefully those who are to be retrained for elementary level. Nevertheless, it is one more possible way for avoiding termination and utilizing present staff in different positions. Termination is a severe action and should be utilized when all other alternatives have been explored.

A People Problem

It is necessary to recognize that reducing school staffs is not an economic problem. Rather it is a "people problem". Districts must exercise extreme care in consulting with surplus personnel. They need guidance, support, assurance, and information.

The superintendent should meet early in the year with potential surplus personnel to provide information to them concerning what the District is doing to help them. Information should be presented about all the avenues that are being explored to protect their jobs. They should be asked to assist in project writing. They should be assured that termination is the last resort.

One meeting, however, is not enough. Periodically, they should meet with the personnel officer, the teacher association officers, the special projects director, and the superintendent. Information and progress reports alleviate anxiety and uncertainty. They also indicate to the employees that the District is sensitive to their situation and is concerned about their employment.

Conclusion.

The schools of this nation will survive declining enrollments in much the same way as they have survived growth, collective negotiations, accountability, federal regulations, and reduced budgets. Dealing with the problems of declining school population requires long-range planning and sensitivity to human needs.

Throughout our history, school officials have confronted many problems and have found solutions to extremely difficult ones. Similarly there are adequate ways of dealing with loss of school population. Some of those strategies have been mentioned in this paper. Others, yet to be discovered, are in the minds of creative school personnel. In the end, we may find declining enrollments to be a new opportunity and not a severe problem. Furthermore, for the younger one, the mid-1980's will gain experience growth.